

## COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
September 29, 2016

### **SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA CONSERVANCY PROGRAM: LAND CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP**

Project No. 08-023-04  
Project Manager: Brenda Buxton

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$275,000 to the Bay Area Open Space Council to support conservation planning in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area by updating the Conservation Lands Network and conducting outreach among Bay Area land conservation entities and the public regarding conservation of the region's biodiversity and open space.

**LOCATION:** All nine counties of the San Francisco Bay Area (San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Alameda, Contra Costa, Solano, Sonoma, Napa, and Marin)

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

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#### **EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: [San Francisco Bay Area Region](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Letters](#)

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#### **RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31160-31165 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to two hundred seventy five thousand dollars (\$275,000) to the Bay Area Open Space Council (Council) to further the natural resource and recreational goals of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program by 1) updating the Conservation Lands Network (CLN) database by collecting new data, updating the user interface, providing training and education, and creating digital and print informational materials; and 2) expanding existing digital media for promoting understanding of the value of regional open space. Prior to the commencement of work and the disbursement of funds, the Council shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a detailed work program, schedule and budget and the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in carrying out the project.”

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Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Conservancy’s mandate to address the resource and recreational goals of the San Francisco Bay area.
  2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
  3. The Bay Area Open Space Council is a nonprofit organization existing under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”
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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends authorization to disburse up to \$275,000 to the Bay Area Open Space Council (the Council) to update the Conservation Lands Network (CLN) and develop regional media and expanded public information for promoting understanding of the value of regional open space in order to further the natural resource and recreational goals of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. The Council, the members of which include 65 Bay Area non-profit conservation organizations and public land management agencies throughout the nine counties of the Bay Area, and will work with a broad array of additional organizations within and beyond the conservation community to accomplish the project objectives.

More specifically, the tasks proposed for funding under this grant include the following:

1. *Update the Conservation Land Network.* In 2011 the Council released the Conservation Lands Network (CLN), the first comprehensive science-based plan for conserving the region’s biodiversity. The Council will update regional priority lands maps based on current natural resources and other data, and will add new information describing the benefits of a given tract of open space (i.e. groundwater recharge, climate amelioration, livestock grazing, etc.). The goal of the updated CLN is to provide Bay Area land managers and conservationists with a robust decision-making tool that also can articulate the full range of social and environmental benefits of land conservation.
2. *Develop regional media and other public information for promoting understanding of the value of regional open space.* The Council will promote open space conservation and stewardship for the region using consistent messaging and materials through the use of Outdoor Voice, a social-media based platform.

This project is a priority for the Conservancy, as it greatly expands the ability of the Conservancy’s Bay Program staff to implement Section 4.5 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation (Public Resources Code Div. 21) which directs the Conservancy to participate in and support interagency actions and public/private partnerships in the San Francisco Bay area in order to identify and adopt long-term resource and outdoor recreational goals for the San

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Francisco Bay area and provide for broad-based local involvement in, and support for, the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.

The Council, through nonprofit fiscal agents such as the San Francisco Park Alliance and Greenbelt Alliance, has successfully carried out several Conservancy grants over a period of 16 years. The Council received tax-exempt status from the IRS as an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in 2014.

**Project History:** The Council has played a unique role in the history of the Conservancy's Bay Area Program, guiding the coalition of public agencies, nonprofit land conservation organizations, and environmental, business and agricultural interests that won passage of the legislation establishing the Bay Area Program in 1997. Founded in 1990, the Council has served its members and the general public as a leader in land conservation planning and implementation, and has helped the Bay Area Program stay up-to-date on challenges and opportunities around the Bay Area. Additional Council accomplishments include preparation and implementation of the CLN project (formerly referred to as the Upland Habitat Goals), which is the first science-based regional process for conservation planning in the Bay Area; development of a web-based tool for finding public transportation to Bay Area parks and open space; convening bi-monthly membership meetings to address common issues and opportunities; and convening an annual parks and open space conference. Past grants to the Council's previous fiscal agents for purposes of assisting the Council with carrying out its mission total approximately \$2 million, with roughly an equal amount of matching funds provided by foundations and public agencies.

## **PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$275,000</b>
Private foundations, BAOSC members	\$705,000
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$980,000</b>

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds is the 2016/17 fiscal year appropriation from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84) (Public Resources Code sections 75001 *et seq.*) for the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. Under section 75060(c), this funding source may be used for San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program projects that protect bays and coastal waters and watersheds, including projects to protect and restore the natural habitat values of coastal waters and lands and projects and expenditures to promote access to and enjoyment of the coastal resources of the state. Proposition 84 funds may also be used for broad-based planning "necessary for the successful design, selection, and implementation of the projects authorized under" Proposition 84 (see section 75072). Consistent with sections 75060(c) and 75072, the proposed project will protect San Francisco Bay through outreach on social media to educate the public and will carry out planning work that is necessary for the selection and implementation projects that protect the natural habitat values of the San Francisco Bay and its watershed and is undertaken pursuant to the Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program, Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, as discussed below.

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For the Outdoor Voice project, the Council has secured matching funds from Kaiser Permanente, Hewlett Foundation (through Greenbelt Alliance), and the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District. For the Conservation Lands Network, the Council has been invited to submit a proposal to the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. The Council continues to fundraising from individuals, foundations, and Council members to support these efforts.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

This project is undertaken in accordance with Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31165, regarding the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.

Under Section 31162, the Conservancy may award grants within the Bay Area that achieve the following goals: (a) improve public access to, within and around the San Francisco Bay, coast, ridgetops, and urban open spaces; (b) protect natural habitats and connecting corridors; (c) assist in the implementation of the adopted plans of local governments and districts; and (d) promote and assist projects that will provide open space and natural areas accessible to urban populations for recreational and educational purposes. The proposed authorization will provide funding that will allow the Council to undertake the planning that is necessary for the selection and implementation of projects within the Bay Area that achieve these objectives.

Section 31163(a) directs the Conservancy to cooperate with local and regional government bodies, non-profit organizations, and other interested parties in identifying and adopting long-term resource and recreational goals for the San Francisco Bay Area. Section 31163(b) directs the Conservancy to "participate in and support interagency actions and public/private partnerships in the San Francisco Bay Area for the purpose of implementing subdivision 31163(a)", and for "providing for broad-based local involvement in, and support for, the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program". The proposed authorization directly carries out these provisions by funding the work of the Council (comprising 65 public and non-profit entities) in identifying priority areas for conservation and generating broad-based public support for protection of San Francisco Bay. Since Conservancy staff participate in the Council's activities, funding the Council's work greatly enhances the ability of Bay Program staff to cooperate and participate with the 65 Council member entities in regional planning with the CLN and outreach efforts about benefits of conservation lands.

This project is appropriate for prioritization under the selection criteria set forth in Section 31163(c) in that (1) it is supported by a multitude of local and regional plans that call for coordinated action to protect open space and recreational opportunities for local and regional use, including the policies of county general plan open space elements throughout the region; policies and plans of local conservation districts such as the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, Marin County Open Space District, and Santa Clara County Open Space Authority; as well as regional conservation plans of entities such as the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG); (2) it serves a regional constituency – the nine-county Bay Area; (3) it can be implemented in a timely way because many project elements and all staff are already in place; (4) it provides opportunities to articulate the need for habitat protection, land conservation, and public access benefits that could

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go unrecognized if the project is not quickly implemented, and (5) it is anticipated to include matching funds.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2013 STRATEGIC PLAN  
GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S), AS REVISED JUNE 25, 2015:**

Consistent with **Goal 10, Objective 10A** of the Conservancy's 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will help fulfill this objective to "identify and prioritize resource and recreational goals, including projects that protect and enhance natural habitats and other open-space lands of regional significance, such as agricultural lands, and those that improve public access to and around the bay, along the ridges and coast, and to open space and natural areas."

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S  
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on October 2, 2014, in the following respects:

**Required Criteria**

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies:** By providing data and information to land managers and the general public, the work of the Council supports a variety of state wildlife, water, and climate change management plans. In particular, this authorization would further the goals of the following plans:

*California @ 50 Million: The Environmental Goals and Policy Report* (Governor's Office of Planning and Research, 2013 Draft) The project supports Goal 4: Improve Coordination Between Agencies and Improve Data Availability

*San Francisco Bay Area Upland Habitat Goals Project and Conservation Lands Network (2011).* The Upland Goals Project is a project of the Council funded in part by the Coastal Conservancy. It is a collaboratively developed science-based landscape-level conservation plan for the nine-county Bay Area region. Multiple factors, including conservation targets, goals, land use, adjacency to protected lands, threats from climate change and the ecological integrity of the landscape were assessed to identify "essential" and "important" areas. These are depicted on a web-based database and map, the *Conservation Lands Network*, which can be used by agencies and organizations to prioritize conservation activities within the region.

4. **Support of the public:** The Council is comprised of 65 public agencies and nonprofit land conservation organizations. Project letters are included in Exhibit 1.
5. **Location:** The proposed project addresses land conservation needs and opportunities in the entire nine-county San Francisco Bay Area.

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6. **Need:** Without the Conservancy's financial support, the Council would not be able to provide important services and work products for the open space community, including regional materials supporting the value of open space, updates and upgrades to the Conservation Lands Network. It would likewise be difficult for the Council to keep in place the regional networks and relationships that make it possible to effectively educate the public about land conservation issues.
7. **Greater-than-local interest:** The proposed project has a regional scope, addressing land conservation needs in all nine Bay Area counties.
8. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The project is itself not subject in any way to sea level rise, but the CLN database includes data regarding vulnerabilities to future sea level rise and other impacts of climate change.

**Additional Criteria**

11. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
13. **Innovation:** The Council seeks to employ innovative, technology-based approaches to bringing the land conservation community together around joint stewardship, media, and conservation planning.
14. **Readiness:** The Council has demonstrated through its previous work funded by the Conservancy that it will be able to conduct the proposed project in a timely manner. The Council's staff have experience with carrying out the work that will be required of them.
15. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** This authorization will expand the effectiveness of outreach and data tracking efforts previously funded by the Conservancy. See "Project History" section above.
16. **Return to Conservancy:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
17. **Cooperation:** The Council builds cooperation among federal, state, regional and local agencies and private nonprofit organizations as a primary focus of its mission.
18. **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise:** While the proposed project does not entail physical improvements that could be vulnerable to climate change impacts, the Conservation Lands Network does provide detailed climate information, including site-level projections regarding climate change vulnerabilities, for use by local land managers, making it a valuable tool to identify impacts of climate change.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:** As set forth in California Code of Regulations Title 14, Section 15262, feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved, adopted or funded do not require preparation of an EIR or negative declaration. Further, basic data collection and resource evaluation activities that do not cause major disturbance to an environmental resource are categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to California Code of Regulations Title 14, Section 15306. The planning component of the proposed project consists only of planning studies and resource evaluation activities that will not disturb any resources and that will inform future actions that have not yet been approved, adopted or funded. Accordingly, the planning component of the proposed project is exempt from CEQA. The outreach component of the proposed project, which consists of using social media

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to educate the public and encourage conservation is not a project within the meaning of CEQA because it does not have the potential to cause a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment. See California Code of Regulations Title 14, Section 15378. Upon authorization, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.